

CHAPTER 3

Authoring research, plagiarising the self?*

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Following Roz Ivanič's influential work on writing and identity, this chapter explores the effects of information technology in the writing of research and on the identity of the researcher. In particular, it suggests that the facility to copy, cut and paste is undermining the notion that research texts making original contributions to knowledge. By contrast, this capacity to copy, cut and paste is providing opportunities for the plagiarising of the self, bringing forth different possibilities for research and the identities of researchers. Here simulation rather than representation becomes crucial to understanding research practices.

Introduction

Traditionally plagiarism is treated as a problem in education. It refers to the unattributed referencing of the work of others. This is an issue which has been of increasing concern with the rise of digital media and the growth of the Internet. However, in this chapter I wish to explore a different notion of plagiarism, which enables "copy", "cut" and "paste" to be positioned as part of the practices associated with the authoring of research texts, and also in the construction of the identity of the researcher. Here, rather than research texts representing an authentic and original contribution to knowledge and the writer an authentic researcher, representation is replaced by simulation and writer identity is manifested in the various embodiments of subjectivity *in* the text and subjectivity *as* a text. The chapter will therefore follow Roz Ivanič's (1998, 2006) influential work on writing and identity, and explore the substance of research and researcher identity in the context in which the practices of writing and representation are being reordered by the use of technologies in the authoring of research. It also draws upon experience of working with Roz on a three year research project (see www.lancs.ac.uk/lflfe),

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within which issues of literacy and identification have been a key focus for discussion. Here we have worked with Hall's (2000) notion of identification as a process rather than identity as a thing. We have also been exploring the digital literacy practices of lecturers and students within this project. These dialogues have entailed discourse across subject boundaries – between applied linguistics and education – which have enriched the discussions. In this chapter, only a small aspect of Roz's work and the work we have jointly done with others is drawn upon. The key focus is on issues of writing and identity in the context of the use of information and communications technologies in the authoring of research texts.

Over the years there has been much written on issues of identity formation in educational practices and the impact of emerging technologies for teaching, learning and pedagogy. The notion of persons as cyborgs has become an influential metaphor through which to examine the changing human-technology relationship/interface. In distance education and e-learning, there has been the discussion of pedagogy as "choreography" and the exploration of the "absence-presence" and "tech(no)body" of the lecturer and student (Evans and Green 1995; McWilliam and Palmer 1995). The changing identities of adults as learners rather than students has been posited and the assumptions and consequences of this explored (Edwards 2002). Thus, questions of identity, pedagogy and the role of technology have become part of the discussions in and about education (Kress 2003; Jewitt 2005).

However, less has been written about the relationship between the researcher and technology in education and the effects of this upon the identity of the researcher and research texts. Indeed, while the discussion of pedagogy has done much to expand debate beyond the instrumental "needs meeting" approach of much of the traditional discourses of teaching and learning, this has not been incorporated significantly into the discourses of research in education. In many ways then, this chapter opens a space (or file) within which to examine certain issues surrounding the identity of researchers and the status of research texts, one which has been, and no doubt will be, returned to (re-opened) on many occasions for review, amendment and development (editing and saving).

The chapter is in three parts. First, I outline the role of research as a set of social practices which are productive of certain "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1980). This counters much of the almost common sense assumptions that research is a reflection of reality and research texts simply a reported representation of a reality found "out there" through the practices of research. This introduces the notion of research as text which is addressed more explicitly in the second section of the chapter. Here, in part drawing upon Baudrillard's (1996) notion of the simulacra, I explore the possibilities for the engendering of a condition of hyperreality through the use of information and communications technology in the practices

of research. In particular, I focus on the use of information technology in the production of research texts. Third, I shall explore the implications of these processes for the identities of researchers. Here I shall focus on whether the possibilities for “copying, cutting and pasting” in the construction of research texts can be said to result in a plagiarising of the self – a perspective which assumes an authenticity in the identity of the researcher – or a self which is itself in a pleasurable and constant process of simulation, for whom authenticity is not a characteristic. Very crudely, these positions would signify a modern conception of the researcher and research to which some notions of authenticity and originality are central, and a postmodern conception in which the processes which are held to be at work – in particular, intertextuality – are reflexively manifested in our understandings of research and the researcher.

A discussion such as this does not lead to ready conclusions – a form of closure (saving and quitting) – and none will be attempted here (as suggested, the file can be re-opened and edited). Others may feel there is no opening to be pursued or it is one that can or should be readily closed. It is in the process of intertextual dialogue that such positions can be established.

Research reflecting reality?

The relationship of research to its object and what legitimately constitutes knowledge is a profound and probably irresolvable question, one which has occupied philosophers, sociologists of knowledge and others for as long as there has been a question, what is knowledge? To review the many attempts to answer that question would take longer than a lifetime and would itself be subject to continuous reinterpretation. Here I wish to make only a few observations upon what oversimplistically I will position as a modernist position. Here for research to be knowledge, it must in some sense provide a true, that is, methodologically validated reflection or representation of reality. In this view, reality is out there to be examined. What that reality is, how it works and why it works in the ways it does is the rightful terrain of research. It is through the practices of research that reality gives up its truths. Although discipline-based, positivist and quantitative approaches to research in education have tended to a large extent in certain contexts to be displaced by practice based, action-oriented, interpretative and qualitative approaches, the modernist assumptions of and about research largely underpin both sets of practices.

However, a number of problems arise in relation to the notion of reflection – ones which, it could be argued, are equally problematic for reflection in notions of professional development and certain other reflective approaches to teaching and

learning. First, research is not a transcendental activity. It is itself a set of social practices, ones that are knowledge-claiming and truth-producing and located in certain research communities (Usher 1993). To say that research reflects reality is to imply that research is a transcendental process, both capable of and providing a god-like view on that which it investigates. This ignores the issue that, as social practices, research acts on, interacts with, or constructs what it researches, which, in effect, masks the ways in which “data”, “knowledge” and “truth” are generated in the very practices of research (Atkinson 1996; Atkinson and Housley 2003). Even if research is undertaken to establish what those effects might be, these are themselves a practice interacting with what is researched, a process which potentially results in an infinite process of regression in the search for the real that is really there by uncovering the factors which cause it to be other than it really is.

While there are important epistemological issues to be addressed in relation to research, it can be argued that what is viewed as legitimate knowledge in a particular arena is established through the practices of the different research communities and their maintenance of certain boundaries, inclusions and exclusions. In this context, we might ask in what ways education may be considered a research community, what organisations, institutions and journals choreograph that community, and what forms of openness and closure, inclusion and exclusion, are made possible and constrained through these practices. In other words, while objects of research are “an effect of stable arrays or networks of relations” (Law 2002:91), they are usually treated as naturalistic objects, pre-existing in the social world. I am therefore following Pels, et al. (2002: 11) in the view that “objects need symbolic framings, storylines and human spokespersons in order to acquire social lives; social relationships and practices in turn need to be materially grounded in order to gain spatial and temporal endurance”. In other words, they need ordering and mobilising, part of which is provided through the circulation of discourses: “different modes of ordering produce certain forms of organisation. They produce certain material arrangements. They produce certain subject positions. And they produce certain forms of knowledge” (Law 2001: 3).

The simple referential and representative relationship between the objective independent world and knowledge of it through research posited in the notion of reflection as a measure of legitimation is therefore problematic. Accurate representation of a discovered world is posited as the goal of research. However, there are fundamental questions about the nature of representation and how truthful representation is achieved within particular research practices (Edwards et al. 2004). The transcendental possibility of discovering truth is assumed, displacing the examination of the ways in which different truths are produced and realised, including those of research. Here reflexivity is a problem to be overcome rather than a resource with which one can work.

Further, to see research as reflection in many ways is to work with an impoverished and limited conception of research. In essence, research becomes necessarily and narrowly empirical in nature, a linear staged process without effect, the only form of research through which reality can be known. This displaces from consideration the complexity of research as a set of practices mediated by artefacts, language, discourse and power (Latour 1999). This includes the power of the research community and its conventions of speech, writing and embodiment, as illustrated in the acceptable forms of journal writing and the giving of conference papers. Research becomes absorbed into a technical rationality, a set of instrumental processes aimed at uncovering the truth of reality. "Research is both disembedded – an essentially ahistorical, apolitical and technical process, a transcendental, contextless set of procedures and disembodied in the sense of being carried out by isolated, asocial, genderless individuals without a history or culture" (Usher 1993: 105). In this sense, conventional forms of research produce the transcendentalism they assume – transcendental truth is a realisation of certain research practices and communities. For, as Foucault (1980: 131) argues: "truth is a thing of this world: it is produced by multiple forms of constraint".

These critiques are of a certain view of research. They are intensified in many ways through the use of information and communications technologies in the conduct of research. Within the conception of research as reflection, these technologies may be thought of as simply additional tools or instruments to be used in the conduct of research – data collection, data analysis, reporting on research. Even here, there are issues, such as the researching of the disembodied learner, or "no-body", through the use of electronic mail, or the shifting possibilities for identity among the researched through the mediation of different technologies. This raises questions about how technologies provide particular possibilities for the "who" who may be the subject of research.

However, the notion of research as a set of knowledge-producing practices traversed by artefacts, language and power suggests that, rather than being considered simply instruments, the use of these technologies needs to be reflexively situated within understandings of their effects. In other words, the emerging technologies are not simply better or more appropriate tools to be used in the research process, but in many ways start to make the knowledge-producing effects of research ever more apparent. In particular, the increased use of information and communications technologies for research, that is the increased communication and mediation of research, raises questions about its textuality – the fact that reality comes always and already interpreted, as a text (Usher and Edwards 1994, 2007).

Texts, textuality and simulacra

The textuality of research challenges the scientific and social scientific notions of the “fiction that research is reported not written” (Barthes 1986:70). Rather than there being an end to research which is reported in what is assumed to be a transparent language, its very nature as written and therefore constitutive of meaning and capable of multiple interpretations is brought to the fore. Here there are issues of the sorts of writing and texts which are accepted as legitimate by a research community and the practices and criteria through which they are constructed and legitimised.

Usher (1993:110) argues that “through the textual strategy of realism [academic texts] direct attention away from themselves as texts to that which they purport to be about”. Realist texts assume and construct a particular relationship between the world and text. Insofar as certain texts are given legitimacy by a research community, they support a particular set of epistemological and narrative assumptions about what constitutes research, knowledge and truth. To produce a different form of text, such as if I had written this chapter in rhyming couplets, is to invite rejection for breaking the narrative rules of a certain research community. Similarly, to suggest that a teaching/learning text may also be a research text can be to push against the boundaries of accepted and acceptable norms. Occasionally such texts may be seen as ground-breaking, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

We might then ask, what constitutes a research text and a text as research in education? An implicit answer to these questions lies in the books, academic journals, and doctoral theses in this arena – those texts which are accepted by the specific research community as legitimate. Indeed, it is often a precursor to having a paper accepted for publication that one reads, learns and adheres to the narrative forms of the journals within the arena of research. Decisions most often lie with peers and, even then, only certain peers, who advise publishers, sit on editorial boards, review papers and examine theses. Here, although all research may be said to be invented and therefore in a sense fictional, only certain texts have legitimacy within the research practices and among research practitioners in education. What is written and what can be written is therefore policed. “Communities decide rules of exclusion, set boundaries and impose closures. Consequently, this narrows what can be done and what will count as legitimate research and valid knowledge outcomes” (Usher 1993:101). Such parameters are, of course, neither entirely homogeneous nor stable, but they remain powerful.

To bring to the fore the textuality of research is to bring into focus the reflexive question of the practices through which meaning is constructed in research, issues which are displaced from consideration by strategies which constitute

research as representative and language as transparent. In previous work (Usher and Edwards 1994), it was suggested that this requires researchers to themselves become reflexive, subjecting their practices to critical self scrutiny in order that they become critical readers as well as writers of research, capable of examining the textual strategies and intertextuality at work in research texts. This involves an examination of the con-text, pre-text and sub-text of research. The con-text is that which is “with the text” – the situated and located self of the writer/reader, embodied and embedded, marked by, for example, gender, class, race, age, geography. These affect the forms, outcomes and consequences of research and the particular readings or interpretations of texts. The pre-text is that which is “before the text”. Here there are the effects of, for instance, language as a signifying system, the adoption of certain writing and textual strategies through which meanings are organised, and certain cultural and interpretative traditions. The sub-text is that which is “beneath the text”, such as, the professional and research paradigms and power-knowledge formations which make certain research powerful and capable of being a regulatory part of the governmentality of modern socialities, even as the neutrality or emancipatory potential of the research is often proclaimed. The textuality of research therefore raises questions of reflexivity which require the examining of research as intertextual, tracing that which makes its very existence as a text possible.

However, this very notion itself becomes radicalised and problematised with the proliferation and diversification of research texts made possible by the development of different information and communications technologies. There has been an expansion of traditional paper-based academic and professional journals – the costs of the production and distribution of which has been cut due to the technologies of globalisation. Similarly the number and range of academic books have expanded greatly. Research is also made available through websites, terrestrial and satellite television, etc. There is the proliferation and globalisation of research texts and research conferences made possible by cheaper international travel. And, with the World Wide Web, there is an explosion of developments in making available research in a range of formats, for instance, through restricted bulletin boards, podcasts, conferences, or in formats which follow the lines of traditional academic journals. Academics and researchers have themselves started to develop their own home pages on the web, from which interested surfers can download copies of articles and papers, which themselves may be subject to continued updating and amendment.

The increased importance given to the relevance and usefulness of research (Lyotard 1984) and “socially distributed knowledge” (Gibbons et al. 1994), and the popularising of research have brought to the fore and made possible, at least to a certain extent, the greater possibilities for the communication of research in

diverse formats to diverse audiences. Traditional conceptions of the dissemination of research to a waiting audience at the end of the research process have been questioned as to their adequacy and efficacy. Engagement with users throughout the research process has been put forward as the future direction for research. Given the greater prevalence of research and proliferation of research texts, what I wish to explore here is how or whether this not only contributes to the foregrounding of the textuality of research, but also starts to contribute to what, drawing on Baudrillard (1996), might be called a hyper-real world of research. Here the very availability of such texts brings into question what counts as a legitimate research text and the possibilities for policing its boundaries by the research community. This can be seen as both the outstripping of the policing mechanisms by the possibilities raised through the use of information and communications technology and as part of the crisis of disciplines and the rise of multi-disciplinary research and trans-disciplinary competences (Gibbons et al. 1994). What counts as research and what is worthwhile reading as research would appear to be coming less obvious even as research activities overall grow.

Baudrillard's work has been very influential in the formulation of the post-modern and also extremely controversial in his, at times, apparent fatalism in the face of a revitalised consumer capitalism with all its associated pleasures and oppressions (Plant 1992; Poster 1996). He is often accused of hyperbole rather than analysis and there is something in that criticism, although it fails to acknowledge that he is writing in ways which, at least in part, seek to disrupt established common sense approaches to reading and writing. While such issues are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is the suggestive nature of some of Baudrillard's ideas which will be drawn upon here, rather than a simple adoption of the particular position he espouses.

For Baudrillard, the proliferation of information and communications technologies makes representation and meaning increasingly problematic. There is an accelerated production of the real which means that meaning slips away amidst a "confusion of signs, images, simulations and appearances" (Plant 1992: 194). Thus, even as representations have a power to invest themselves as something behind which lies the real, the true, the authentic, the meaningful, their very proliferation results in a production of the hyper-real in which "ubiquitous images, simulations, and reproductions no longer distort or conceal the real; reality has slipped away into the free-floating chaos of the hyper-real" (Plant 1992: 155). In this situation, representations and the real are not separable and, for Baudrillard; representations become more real than the real. They become simulacra, part of the production of the hyper-real in which everything becomes undecidable.

Everywhere the same “genesis of simulacra:” the interchangeability of the beautiful and the ugly in fashion; of the right and the left in politics; of the true and false in every media message ... All the great humanist criteria of value, all the values of a civilisation of moral, aesthetic, and practical judgement, vanish in our system of images and signs. (Baudrillard 1996: 128)

Thus, for Baudrillard the possibilities for the production and reproduction of representations through technological mediations result in a situation in which it becomes no longer possible to determine what is authentic or original. “The real becomes not only that which can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: the hyper-real” (Baudrillard 1996: 145–6). In other words, the real is always media-ted and therefore always already interpreted. It is on this basis that he identifies four phases of the image: the reflection of a basic reality; a masking of a perversion of a basic reality; masking the absence of a basic reality; and, bearing no relation to any reality, it becomes its own pure simulacrum. Here while “representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum” (Baudrillard 1996: 170). There is no real behind representation, merely the practices of simulation and the production of the hyper-real.

Within this context, it might be argued that the proliferation of research texts is itself part of the process of simulation, of the production of the hyper-real in which it may be criteria other than their representativeness or originality that are paramount. The notion of research as an original contribution to knowledge is undermined as its absorption in the processes of simulation and production of the hyper-real are foregrounded. There is no original contribution to make, merely simulation and the traces of intertextuality to be examined.

Rather than the search for truth or deep meaning, there is a pleasurable pursuit of a range of truths and truth-telling practices. This resonates with Barthes’ (1986) view of research as texts of at times “disturbing pleasure”. And, as Game (1993: 18) argues, “this is perhaps to suggest that the central issue in the evaluation of a text – theoretical or otherwise – is its capacity to provoke disturbing pleasure: not a refusal of knowledge, but a reformulation of what the desire for knowledge might be about”. Such reformulations may include truth as revelation (religious knowledge), or truth as advocacy (feminist or post-colonial knowledge), as well as truth as correspondence (scientific knowledge). It is disturbing pleasure in many truth-tellings and the multiple possibilities for identity which underpins the desire for knowledge – an openness – rather than the desire to assert the truth – a closure – raising questions about the aesthetics and eroticism of research texts. This is something already pursued in relation to pedagogy by McWilliam (1996).

Research, texts and identity

The suggestion, then, is that the introduction of new information and communication technologies into research practices brings to the fore and radicalises the textuality of research texts, resulting in the production of the hyper-real through simulation. What then of the identity of the researcher? What are the possible implications for researcher identity of participating in research practices subject to these processes?

At the heart of research as representation in the search for truth is the rational and humanistic researcher – governed by reason and humane values – making original contributions to knowledge. While this narrative of researchers can be countered by their contribution to, for example, warfare, famine and ecological degradation, it nonetheless provides a powerful prescription of how the researcher should be governed and should govern themselves. Modernist metanarratives legitimise the social practices of research communities who, even as they police research texts, also and at the same time, establish boundaries for the identity of the researcher, boundaries which are often grounded in the discipline of the particular community. Yet this governing of identity is not explicit in the narratives of research and researchers. Rather, there is a mirroring of the real external world in the real internal world of the researcher. In other words, in the view of research as representation – as finding out the truth of the real world “out there” – there is an implicit view of the identity of the researcher – of the real world “in there”, of an authentic self governed by reason and humane values. The real world out there is posited upon and posits a real internal world. Researcher identity is centred, unified and authentic.

It is within this set of assumptions and the practices they produce that the plagiarising of research texts is constructed as a problem. Here I am using the notion of plagiarising in an unfamiliar way. Traditionally plagiarising has been used to refer to drawing upon the work of others without due reference. However, what I want to suggest is that the possibilities of simulation in the production of research texts raised by information and communication technologies result in the potential for a plagiarising of the self of the researcher. If authenticity is a primary characteristic marking the researcher, then the texts of research they produce also have to be evaluated by the criteria of authenticity and originality. If the researcher produces multiple research texts, then we have to judge which the original is and whether it is original. In an earlier period, when there was more limited production and circulation of research texts, this would have been fairly straightforward. We could have simply worked through the dates when research became available and examined the texts for references and examples of plagiarising. However, with the proliferation of research texts, their differential production

schedules and with the possibility for them to be continually reworked (as, for example, with a personal home page on the Web), authenticity, origins and originality become far more problematic. Research texts may appear in a variety of forms and formats, in response to which we can continue to search for the original text or, recognising textuality and the processes of simulation, we can take disturbed pleasure in particular texts and examine their intertextual traces and graftings, placing to one side questions of authenticity and originality. On this basis, research texts can no longer claim originality, but rather are examined and enjoyed for their intertextuality and sampling. This involves a reformulation of research practices which it can be argued is actually taking place as the use of information and communications technologies problematises the policing of boundaries. However, this should not discount the modernist self-understandings that still continue to be powerful within certain research communities.

If we hold to the search for authentic texts, then there is also the constant policing of the identity of the researcher to ensure their authentic self. The multiple productions of research texts are evaluated in terms of how the researcher might be plagiarising themselves (and others) in the multiple use of certain aspects of the text. Authenticity, like meaning therefore, becomes something which is achieved through social practices, rather than something which exists to be dis/un-covered through research practices and counselling/psychotherapy.

However, if we consider the processes of simulation made possible by the proliferation of information and communications technologies, then the questions of originality and authenticity and, with that, the importance given to the notion of plagiarising fall to one side – at least in relation the self of the researcher. Here the identities of the researchers may be argued to be more open-ended, decentred, multiple, capable of generating a range of narratives about their research and themselves as researchers, traversed as they are by the many ambiguous and contradictory discourses of identity. Here, the use of “copy, cut and paste” in the construction of research texts may be considered a metaphor for the identity of the researcher, taking pleasure in the various embodiments of the self in texts and self as text rather than being concerned with questions of originality and (in)authenticity.

Troubled pleasure?

Roz Ivanič has demonstrated a consistent interest in issues of writing and identity over the years and the importance of identification to the meaningful engagement of people in literacy practices. This chapter has attempted to explore similar terrain from a different angle, focussing on the writing of research and researcher

identity in the context of the use of information and communications technologies as artefacts. Whether a research community, with its concerns for boundaries, inclusions and exclusions, can live with the open-endedness of simulation is open to question. Perhaps, more importantly, given the availability of information and communications technologies, it is able to police their boundaries effectively in the face of increased challenge from various quarters is open to question and struggle. However, there can be little doubt that part of the introduction of new technologies into research practices necessitates a questioning of the assumptions underpinning those practices. For example, in this text it is possible for me to identify earlier manifestations of parts of the text which have been “copied, cut and pasted” from elsewhere. There are intertextual traces to be discerned. The trace of my ongoing collaboration with Robin Usher can also be found. The chapter itself (a file on a computer) has been subject to much “opening” and “editing” – it is no longer original. Indeed, as author, I can no longer remember what the first version of this discussion looked like.

Taking troubled pleasure in the research texts of education and making no claims to authenticity in my identity as the author of this text or its originality may appear to be unlikely conclusions (at the point of saving and quitting – for the moment). However, they are not intended as conclusions, but as textual possibilities, open to re-reading and re-writing and even maybe further plagiarising. The use of new technologies begins to raise important issues about writing and identity in research wherein simulation and plagiarism may take on an unexpected significance. Whether Roz Ivanič would approve of this proposition is open to question. I suspect there may be some troubled pleasure and a little mirth.

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